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THE PRICE, Part One

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We return today to the third chapter of Genesis. *Here we are, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, two of the most special occasions of great joy during the year, and all the preacher wants to talk about is sin!* The truth is that if we really understand the nature of sin, we'll have much more to be thankful for and much more to celebrate at this time of the year. In fact, in the discussion to follow, we are going to trace the very beginning of what we call Christmas.

You see, the world does not care much for Christmas as a holy day. Sure, Christmas is celebrated as a cultural thing with candy and toys and Santa Claus; but as a holy day, it garners either indifference or antagonism. In other words, most people don't care about the message of Christmas; and many of those that do care at all hate it. The truth is that our culture has lost the sense of why Christmas even exists. It exists because there is very, very bad news about humanity; and until we understand the fulness of that bad news, we cannot appreciate the miraculous good news of Christmas.

But first, a short review:

The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was created by a perfect, just and holy God for His own purpose in a perfect world. As such, it was surely beautiful to the woman; but it was a beauty not intended for her to take for herself and consume. She had been warned not to eat of that fruit.

But she gave into temptation. The natural attraction became unnatural. She saw that the tree was good for food and pleasant to the eyes, and she believed that it would make her wise, as only God can be. But she was deceived: God is not God because He is wise, *but because He is infinite*. Furthermore, God is not wise because He knows evil and good experientially, for *He has experienced only good*. Partaking of evil does not make one like God at all; in fact, it totally separates us from Him, and separation from God is death. God told Adam and Eve the whole truth when He told them that they would "surely die" if they ate of that forbidden fruit.

In the moment that she took that fruit, she trampled the goodness of God toward her under her feet. She disdained her exalted position as queen of the earth, as a child of Creator God, and as the only bride of a perfect man. All that she had was not enough; all that mattered was the one thing God had reserved unto Himself, one tiny speck of creation that was His alone. She desired that speck and traded the vastness of her riches on the gamble that *that one speck would be worth more*. She gambled her very life against the worth of that one fruit and the knowledge that it was supposed to bring.

We know why the woman ate the fruit, because this account tells us directly what was in her heart and mind. The account does not tell us why the man ate; but the mystery is not hard to unravel. Paul tells us in 1 Tim. 4:12,

And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

Adam saw that his wife had eaten the fruit, even as she offered it to him; but he was not tempted by the

serpent. In fact, the serpent had no need to tempt Adam; his work was finished. The woman had eaten, and it would naturally follow that the man would eat. The woman presented her husband with a choice: he must follow her to whatever end, or follow God and suffer separation from his wife. The Bible marks no hesitation on Adam's part. He cast his lot with his wife in rebellion against God.

The point today is that the woman had her reasons for rebelling against God, and the man had his reasons for rebelling against God. *We would be foolish to ignore those reasons, for they are the universal experience of mankind.* We all experience the temptation to rebel against God's clear commands, and those temptations come to us in the same manner today.

The man and the woman have both partaken of the fruit and the pleasure that it afforded them; but the pleasure is short lived and proves to be totally fraudulent, a counterfeit of the true happiness God had prepared for them.

That brings up to what we need to talk about today: the price of their decision to rebel against God. It would really be more accurate to say *prices*, because there are both instant and long-lasting consequences to their actions. God had promised them that they would "surely die"; and as we've mentioned before, the Hebrew would be well-translated as "dying, thou shalt die!"

"Dying"--the long lasting consequences, carried out over time

"Thou shalt die"--the immediate consequences

Let's turn to Genesis 3:

7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

9 And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

Eating the fruit "opened their eyes," as the woman had believed it would, but not in the precise way she thought it should have. Instead of opening their eyes and her mind to wisdom and making them like God, it opened their eyes and minds and hearts to something entirely new: shame and guilt. Have you ever been so embarrassed or ashamed that you just wanted to die? You know the feeling then--and you remember the events for as long as you live!

I'm going to tell you a story about one of the dumbest things I ever did as a child. I was eight years old. My parents were new to church and they felt that putting me and my brothers into a Christian school was important. They sent us to the little school operated by our church. We had no playground and no playground equipment. We had our recess time out behind the church in a parking lot. I remember

falling down and ripping the knees of my double-knit polyester pants on several occasions, which, you would think, would make me consider the action I'm going to tell you about a little more carefully. Asphalt is hard stuff! Well, there was just one piece of equipment to play on, and that was a balance beam someone had made from a 2x4. It was a low beam, about 6 or 8 inches off the ground, and normally a fall from that distance wouldn't be enough even to slow down a boy my age. I walked across the beam several times one particular day in the late fall, trying to show off for a girl in my class. She was fairly adept at walking the beam and was nonplussed at my achievements. I decided to up the ante. I pulled my hands into my jacket and zipped it up so that my hands were sticking out by my neck. Then I called to the girl to watch me as I gallantly strode across the beam. I remember losing my balance. I remember panicking because I couldn't steady myself with outstretched arms. I remember seeing the asphalt come nearer and nearer. I remember feeling the asphalt with my face, and feeling the little pebbles in my skin. I remember not being able to free my arms. I remember the girl screaming and running for help. I remember an adult coming to get me and leading me through the room where some of the older kids were eating lunch, and seeing the looks on their faces as they sickened at the sight of blood. I remember apologizing to the pastor for bleeding in his car on the way to the hospital. Oh, yes--I remember it all very vividly. I was ashamed when my parents came. I was ashamed to return to school. I knew I had done something very stupid; and you know what? I didn't impress any girls that way, I can tell you that!

I've done worse things than that, which I'm not going to tell you about just because there is still shame and embarrassment to this day. We all know and experience shame, but for Adam and Eve, shame and guilt were something entirely new. They begin to pay the price for their sin.

As the realization of what they have done settles in, they realize that they have contaminated themselves and their offspring after them. They realize that they are naked, and this also is a cause for shame. You see, *sin perverts nakedness*. It perverts everything, in fact, but we notice it especially with nakedness. When God made the man and his wife, they were naked and not ashamed; however, after Genesis chapter 3, we find nakedness linked to shame throughout the Bible. Sin perverts nakedness. We are born with a sense that open nakedness is wrong; we may not understand why, but the sense is there. It is only by hardening our hearts that we can dismiss the wrongness of it; and what you will find is that those who endorse public nudity not only harden their own hearts to the wrongness of it, but must encourage others to do so as well. In America today, the nudists are becoming bolder and bolder, even to the point of claiming discrimination if their landlord prevents them from gardening in the nude!¹ The idea seems to be, "If *I* determine something is right, then *everyone else* must accept it." And so we see in this attitude the very lie of a promise offered by the serpent: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil"; you'll get to decide what is right and wrong for you.

Adam and Eve, recognizing their shame, felt compelled to do something about it. They had no knowledge of using plant fibers to make cloth for coverings, because there was no need for cloth up to that point. Skinning an animal would never have entered their minds. They had never witnessed a death, and all the animals had only been gentle. They make do with leaves. The specifics of how they sewed them are not mentioned, but it's not too hard to imagine them figuring something rather rapidly. The account here implies that the aprons they made were crudely fashioned. I'm guessing that most of you might figure out how to do something like that. Let's say you took a vine, poked holes in several leaves, inserted the vine into the holes in each leaf, and so made a string of leaves. *Viola!* Repeat a few

1 Associated Press, "Boulder Nudists Claim Landlord Discrimination." *Summit Daily News*. 6 June 2009. Available at <http://www.summitdaily.com/article/20090606/NEWS/906069985/-1/rss01>.

times and you'd have an apron of leaves.

The account continues: *And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.* The implication was that a visit from God in visible form was something rather typical. God Himself came down to talk to His special creation, man and woman. The theological term for a visible manifestation of God in human form is a Theophany. Most orthodox theologians recognize these Theophanies as appearances of Jesus, the living Word of God--but that is a long discussion which we will save for another sermon. The point today is that God appeared to Adam and Eve in their pristine state and had fellowship with them; but now the relationship must change. The Friend becomes the Judge, *not by His choice, but because of their choice.* Where there was joy at meeting Him before, there is shame and guilt and attempting to hide. There is, however, no hiding from Him!

My friends, it will be so with us as well. We will meet Him someday; will you meet Him as a Friend, or as a Judge? The choice is just as much yours to make today as it was Adam's and Eve's then. If you meet Him as a Friend, there will be no need or desire to hide; but if you meet Him as a Judge, beware! There is no hiding!

Let's consider verse 9:

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

God calls to Adam. Normally Adam and Eve would not have hesitated to meet their Friend; this day is different. They do not rush to meet their friend, but instead fly from Him and hide.

Does God not know where they are? Of course He does; but it is much better that they who have trespassed His only command come forward of their own will. If they will come of their own accord, there is much greater hope for them. Coming out of hiding is a sign that they have not hardened their hearts, and that they recognize the wrongdoing. Remaining hidden would be a sign that they cared more about themselves than about the One they have sinned against. We still do this today when we ask someone accused of a crime to turn himself in.

We see then that there is a glimmer of hope. They hid because they recognized the fault and the shame; the very recognition of wrongdoing is a step toward restoration. The Lord God has called out to them; how will they respond? Will they take the next step?

10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

Adam comes forward and makes a partial admission. He doesn't disclose why he knew he was naked, but only that he was naked and ashamed to be seen. Part of him still wants to hide.

Now, I know none of you have ever done that--told *part* of the truth! The fact is that it does seem very hard to make a full confession, even though it is always to our benefit to do so. We can make up any number of reasons to justify why it might be best to tell only part of the truth, but a *half truth is still a lie.* Even if you convince yourself that you're really "protecting" the one you hurt by your action, and decide not to tell all, in the end the truth will be known and the damage will be greater. Be always honest. *Easier said than done, right?*

I'm going to take a short side trip here, because something needs to be said: it is up to the person who has done wrong to confess to the one they have sinned against. We don't confess for someone else and

tell their tale for them. That is unjust and completely wrong. If you know someone is doing wrong, you go talk to that person. Don't talk *about* them--talk *to* them. That is what God instructs us to do in order to restore a sinning brother or sister in Christ. Anything else is classified in the Bible as gossip and backbiting. Don't come to me and say, "Preacher, I think so-and-so is committing such-and-such sin." No! You go to the person first and talk to them about it. Nor do we give an ear if someone comes to us with a report--send that person to talk to the one they are saying something about! Some of the time I think you'll find that there is a reasonable explanation and that you didn't know the whole story; but if it something legitimate, you may very well be intervening to help solve a problem before it becomes a crisis. Speak the truth *in love!* (Ephesians 4:15). In other words, make sure it's true by talking to the person, and when you do, approach them in love with an eye toward restoration. In the verses surrounding Ephesians 4:15, the apostle is directly referring to building up the body of Christ. We are to build up, not tear down. Don't be judgmental or self-righteous, because nothing good can come of that. Keep in mind that I'm talking in the context of a private sin; handling something that is open and public is a different matter.

Back to Genesis 3:

11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

God's response to Adam is to try to draw out the rest of the truth. God accepts no less than total disclosure. He is the only Judge in the universe who can read the thoughts and intents, the inner motives, of those who stand accused before Him. All other judges must try to use external evidence to perceive the inner workings of the heart; and even the very best human judge is bound to read the evidence wrong from time to time. The words of Jeremiah 17:9-10 are instructive:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

God knows the heart. Here He draws the truth out of Adam so that Adam can see it and recognize it for himself.

Isn't that just the way we are? We lie to ourselves and justify in our minds what we have done. We seek to insulate and protect ourselves by blaming others and by rationalizing our faults. That is just what we will see as God draws a response from Adam. Adam has, in his own mind, turned the blame for his actions on Eve and ultimately to God Himself, as we shall see next week.

But what can we take home this week? We need to understand that we will meet God someday, either as a Judge or as a Friend, and we have the opportunity to decide that now, before we leave this earth. We need to understand that when we do wrong, we must make a full confession to the one we've sinned against. We need to understand that if we do observe sinful behavior within the body of Christ, we must speak to the offender truthfully and lovingly with the goal of restoring that one. Finally, we need to understand that God reads our hearts; if there is something we are lying about to Him and to ourselves, we need to actively seek to get it right--completely, totally, honestly right.